



PROD

Promoting Responsible Ownership of Dogs

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Becoming a Foster Parent: Are You Ready?

by: **Melissa Bahleda**

- Fostering a dog, cat, rabbit, horse, or any other animal in need of shelter, love, and guidance is a time-consuming effort, but it's also some of the most rewarding ways to help homeless pets. Providing a "stepping stone" for animals in search of permanent homes saves lives, alleviates the strain on animal shelters, helps set the stage for successful adoptions, and teaches you the skills that will enable you to help other animals in need.
- I have found that dogs and cats who are fostered in positive, nurturing environments by people with basic training and behavior knowledge are more likely to be adopted; less likely to be returned to the shelter; less likely to suffer from behavior and training problems; and less stressed and more able to adapt to life in their new homes.
- **Does fostering fit your household and your life?** The health and welfare of all individuals in your home - human and animal - must be considered before bringing another creature into the mix. Fostering a homeless pet should never be considered unless your home environment is happy, safe, healthy, and spacious enough to nurture the foster pet adequately and retain sanity among the existing members of your home.
- Fostering a pet is a 24/7 job.
- If your work or family schedule is already so hectic that adding another time-consuming responsibility will only create more stress, do not consider fostering at this time.
- The amount of personal attention needed will vary greatly from animal to animal, but you can expect to spend anywhere from three to seven hours a day interacting with a foster pet, and even more if you're planning to foster puppies or kittens. Teaching dogs or cats the lessons they will need to become happy, thriving, lifelong members of another family is the essence of fostering, and this takes time and patience.

- Because dogs and cats passed from home to home or repeatedly returned to the shelter tend to suffer from bonding and behavioral problems, you must be willing to allow a significant amount of time and training in areas of housetraining, crate training, leash training, and basic obedience.
- **What kind of foster animal would be best for your family?** Any animal considered for fostering should be healthy, fully vaccinated, behaviorally sound, and disease-free.
- I knew I could only foster dogs who are known to be non-aggressive with other animals or children, and who do not possess a high prey drive. (In general, this is the type of dog I recommend others foster as well. Minor behavior problems such as separation anxiety and house training issues can usually be addressed with a little time, effort, and knowledge, but aggression issues should be left to the experts.)
- Remember, fostering does not work if it's stressful for anyone involved, including other pets. If bringing a young puppy or kitten into your home stresses out your animal family members or puts any of them in danger, you may need to reconsider what types of animals you foster - or even reconsider fostering altogether. Saving one animal's life while jeopardizing or reducing the quality of another's isn't justified.
- **Are you prepared to say goodbye?** Although I exercise and socialize my foster dogs with my own dogs every day, I also plan "Mom Time" activities solely for my own dogs. Not only does this soothe relations between the temporary and permanent members of my canine family; it also helps me keep "my pets" mentally separated from "my foster pets" so the level of attachment I experience with both sets of dogs remains different, and the line between the two does not become blurred.....If you find it hard to say goodbye, imagine how happy your foster pet will be in his or her new home - and remember how you helped make that happen.